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EXTRACTS

FROM THE

KONGS-SKUGG-SIO;

Or, Speculum Regale.

THE SPECULUM REGALE is in the Norwegian language, and professes to give, in a dialogue between a Father and a Son, an account of the occupations and duties of four classes of men, namely, of Merchants, of those connected with the Court, together with the King himself, of the Clergy, and of the Peasants: it was thus to have been divided into four parts, the two last of which are not extant, and probably were never finished; the MS. copies of the two former are very numerous. The *Speculum Regale* appears to have been written about the time of King Sverrer, perhaps by one of his party during his contest with Archbishop Eric, at the end of the 12th century, as the authority of the King over the Church is strongly asserted. It was published in 4to. at Soroe, 1768. This edition was prepared by Halfdan Einersen, Rector of the

Latin School at Holum, in Iceland, and was printed under the care of John Erichsen ; it contains the Norse text, with various readings and notes, and a Danish and a Latin translation, a long Danish preface by Erichsen, and a Latin dissertation by John Finsen, afterwards Bishop of Skalholt, who, as well as the great antiquary Schonning, had undertaken to publish the work, but they both gave up their projects, and assisted Erichsen with their collections.

The following description of the North Sea, and of Greenland, is in the 1st part, which contains instructions for merchants and sailors.

P. 173, after a description of sea-giants and mermaids, " In the same sea are many more wonders, though they cannot be reckoned among monsters, for when the deep ocean is passed, there is so great a quantity of ice, that the like is not to be met with in any other part of the world. — Some of these masses of ice appear flat, as if the sea itself had been frozen to the depth of four or five ells, and they extend so far from the shore, that men may journey four days or more over the ice, before they reach

the land. This ice lies off the coast rather towards the north-east and north, than towards the south, south-west, or west, and for this cause, whoever would go to that country must sail round, until he has cleared the ice, and then he may stand in to the shore. But it has often happened that men have attempted to get near the land too soon, and have driven against the ice, and some have been lost, and some have escaped, and some of these we have seen, and have heard their narratives. All who have been thus set fast have found it necessary to take their boats, and to drag them with them along the ice, and to proceed in this manner towards the land, deserting their ship and all its cargo ; and some have been four or five days on the ice, and some longer, before they arrived at the land. These masses of ice are wonderful in their nature ; they sometimes lie as immoveably as possible, being intersected by various openings, gulfs, and bays ; and sometimes their motion is so rapid, that they advance faster than a ship before a fair wind, and this, as well against the wind as with it, when once they begin to drive. There are some masses of ice of

a different appearance, which the Greenlanders call Fiall Jokla (ice mountains) they rise out of the sea like high mountains, and never unite with the other ice; but stand singly.

In this sea are all kinds of whales, as we have before stated; so also, as it is said, are there all kinds of seals, and they resort much to this ice, because they are sure there of food in abundance. These are the various kinds of seals that are to be found there: one is called the North Seal, and is not more than four ells in length; another is the Aurkn Seal, the longest of which are five or six ells in length. There is a third kind called the Flat Seal, of nearly the same length with those which we have before described: a fourth is called the Green Seal; some of these are six, and the largest even seven ells in length. There are other smaller species, one of which is called the Opno Seal, because it does not swim like other seals, but lying on its back or on its side, and these are not more than four ells long. The smallest kind of seals is called Skemmingur; these are not more than two ells in length; their nature is wonderful,

for it is said that they go under the flat ice, and blow against it till they make large holes through it, even if it be four or five ells in thickness.

There is yet one species remaining, which the Greenlanders reckon of the whale kind, though it seems to me that it should rather be considered of the seals. These animals are called Rostungar, (the Walrus) the largest being 14 or 15 ells in length. This fish resembles a seal in its hair, its head, and its skin, together with its hind and fore paws. It is not eaten on fast days more than other seals, from which it differs only in this—that it has two large and strong tusks, beside the other smaller teeth, which are fixed in the upper jaw, far back, and the largest of which are nearly an ell and a half in length. Its skin is both thick and good for ropes, and those made of it are so strong, that full 60 men may pull at one of them without breaking it. The seal, which we have now described, is called a fish, because it lives in the sea with other fishes; it is good food for man, but it may be considered flesh, as it not eaten on fast days as other fish: whales are eaten on fast days,

but not seals; excepting in cases where meat is allowed. I know nothing more that is worthy of notice in the sea itself of Greenland.

This account of monsters, which are said to exist in that sea, and of the fishes, must appear very curious to all who hear it. It appears, indeed, that this sea is more boisterous than any other; but this seems to me inexplicable, since it is also more covered with ice, both winter and summer, than any other in the world. It is also a cause of wonder to me, that men are so eager to go to these parts, at so great a risk of their lives, and what can they expect to find in this country, that may serve for use or ornament? So, also, I would, with thy leave, enquire how the inhabitants live, and of the state of the country; whether it is altogether covered with ice, as the sea, or whether the land is thawed, though the sea be frozen; also, if there be any corn in this country as in others. I desire also to know if it be a continent, or an island, and whether there are any animals and other things which are found on continents.

Thou desirest to know what men can

seek in this country, and why they go thither at so great a risk. This may be referred to three principles of human nature. One cause is the love of enterprize and ambition, since the disposition of many people leads them wherever there is most danger, that they may make themselves famous. Another motive is the thirst of knowledge and the wish to see remarkable things, and to prove whether that which has been related of them be true or not. The third motive is the desire of gain, which men pursue through all dangers, wherever it may be obtained. But in Greenland, as thou mayst well suppose, whatever comes from other lands bears a high price; seeing this country lies at so great a distance from all others, and that it is seldom visited by strangers, and the inhabitants are obliged to make up for the deficiencies of their own soil, by importing both iron, and tar, and wood, and all that is required for building their houses. In return for these imports, the merchants bring back goat-skins, the hides of cattle, seal-skins, and the ropes which we have mentioned above, called

Svard-reip, and which are made of the skins of the Rostungar, also the teeth of those animals.

As to thy enquiry whether any corn be sown there or not, it seems to me that the country depends little on this for its support. The chief men, and the richest there, sow small fields by way of trial, but the people in general know not what bread is, and have never seen corn. Thou askest me of the extent of the country, and whether it is part of a continent or an island; I believe few know much on this head, but all conjecture that it is a continent or part of a main land, because it is well known, that there is great plenty of those animals which are found on continents, seldom in islands, unless they have been brought thither, of which, in this case, there is no likelihood. There are many hares in this country, also wolves, and a great number of reindeer, and it is generally believed that these animals are not found in islands, unless imported; and it is considered as certain, that they have not been brought into Greenland by man, but that they must have run over from another part of the con-

tinent. There are also many bears, and they are white, and men think that they are peculiar to this country, since they are of a very different nature to the black bears which live in the woods. These prey on horses, and oxen, and other cattle; but the white bear, which is in Greenland, lives chiefly out at sea, upon the ice, and he takes seals and whales which are his food, and he swims as well as the seals and whales themselves.

As to thy enquiry whether the land is thawed, or whether it is covered with ice like the sea, thou mayst know certainly, that but a very small tract of ground is free from the ice, with which the rest of the country is covered like the sea. Men little know whether this is a great land or not, because all the ranges of mountains, and the valleys, are covered with ice, so that no passage is to be found, though it is conjectured that there must be some open way, either through the valleys which lie between the mountains, or along the shore, by which the animals can pass, since they could never have got thither from other countries, unless they had found some tract free from ice,

and where the ground was thawed. Men have often attempted to go up the country, and have ascended the highest mountains, in various parts, to discover whether there were any spot which appeared thawed and habitable, but they have observed none, excepting that in which the colonists now live, and this is a very small tract along the shore. There is much marble in that part of the country which is inhabited, and it is of various colours, red, blue, and green. There are large falcons in plenty, and they are much esteemed in other lands; they are a kind of hawk, of a white colour, but though they abound here more than elsewhere, the people know not how to make use of them.

Thou saidst before, in our conversation, that there is no corn in Greenland, I will now, therefore, ask thee, on what food the people live, and how many they are in number, also, whether they have received Christianity or not?

The population is small, because so little of the country is habitable, but the people are Christians, and have Churches and Priests. If this settlement lay nearer other

lands, it would be accounted the third part of a Bishoprick, but seeing it is so far removed from the rest of the world, it has of necessity a Bishop for itself. As to thy question, on what food the Greenlanders live, seeing they have no corn, it must be observed, that there are many lands which produce no crops and yet are inhabited, because man liveth not by bread alone. But it is said that the farms are large and good, and that the inhabitants possess both sheep and cattle, and that they make much butter and cheese, on which they live, as well as on meat, and on the produce of the chase, as the flesh of reindeer, whales, and seals; they also eat the flesh of the white bear; and this is the food of the Greenlanders."

In answer to more questions, the author, after dividing the world into five zones, the middle one being uninhabitable, from heat, and the two outer ones, from cold, proceeds—(p. 198.)

"And if my reasoning be correct, it is not unlikely that Greenland may lie under the frigid zone, since those who have been long in Greenland bear witness that the cold

there is excessive, and the sea and land also testify its rigour, since they are both frozen winter and summer, and completely covered with ice. Men say, as a certainty, that Greenland lies at the further extremity of the world towards the north, and I believe that there is no land beyond it, and nothing but that open and immense ocean which encircleth the world. Wise men say that there is a streight by Greenland, through which that wild ocean enters, and diffuses itself throughout all countries, dividing them from each other, and forming bays and harbors.

As to thy question, whether the sun shines in Greenland, and whether it ever happens that the weather is fair there, as in other parts, thou mayst know certainly, that bright sunshine is to be found there, and that the weather is very fair, about midsummer. But the course of the sun there is very extraordinary, for the winter is nearly all one night, and the summer is all as it were one day. When the sun is at the highest, it gives forth plenty of light and brightness, but it has little power as to warmth and heat: yet it thaws the earth,

and so far warms it, that it produces good and sweet-scented grass; and thus the people are enabled to live in the country, though in a very small part of it.

And as to the enquiry which thou hast often made, what that is which the Greenlanders call the Northern Light, I am not fully able to answer it, although I have particularly questioned those men who have been longest in Greenland, but they have no certain knowledge on this head: for it is in this subject, as in most others that are known imperfectly, the wisest men give into guesses and conjectures, and can only reason from what seems to them most probable. But the nature and appearance of the Northern Light is this, that it is ever brightest when the night is darkest, and it is always seen at night, never in the day, and seldom when the moon shines. It appears like the flame of a great fire afar off, which shoots up into the air in pointed rays that vary in height, and are in continual motion, overtopping each other alternately; and thus this light has the appearance of a blazing fire: and when these rays are highest and brightest, the light from them

is so strong, that those who are abroad can well follow their road, and can even see to hunt if it be necessary. So also, if men are sitting in their houses, (in which there are windows) it is so light within that they can clearly distinguish one another. This light varies in brilliancy; it is sometimes dull, as if a dark mist or vapour had arisen, and it appears as if the light were obscured by that mist, and almost, as it were, extinguished; and when the mist begins to clear away and disperse, the light shines forth again and becomes bright: and sometimes men observe large sparks shooting from it, as sparks of iron just glowing from the furnace. When the night draws near its end, and the day dawns, this light begins to decrease, and it is not visible again during the day."

P. 211—" As to what thou sayest of the climate of Greenland, that it is wonderful that it can be called *good*, I will tell thee how that country is placed in this respect: When the weather is bad it comes with greater violence than in other parts, with terrible winds, and severe frost and snow; but the bad weather usually lasts for a

short time only, and leaves long intervals of fair weather, though the climate is cold, which proceeds from the nature of the ice mountains, whence a cold gust always springs. This drives away vapours, and keeps the sky clear, but the neighbouring lands suffer from this wind, for upon them come the storms, which it drives before it with its cold blast."

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